

Can. Pam. C.
A VINDICATION

OF

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

THE STANDARDS

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY

THE REV. PRINCIPAL CAVEN, D.D.,

PROFESSOR OF EXEGETICS, KNOX COLLEGE, TORONTO.

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JAMES CAMPBELL AND SON,

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PREFACE.

THE following pages are, with little alteration, a reprint of an Essay published in the second volume of the "Canada Presbyterian Church Pulpit." The Essay is expository more than controversial in form ; but it deals with topics on which a good deal has recently been written, and on which much diversity of opinion clearly exists. The defence of the distinctive doctrines of the Westminster Confession, or what is known as the Calvinistic or Reformed Theology, is not here proposed : the vindication of Calvinism is a thing entirely distinct from the vindication of the importance of Doctrinal Standards.

The writer of the essay entertains sentiments of respect and affection for those branches of the Church of Christ which deem it inconsistent with due regard for the supremacy of the Scriptures to recognise any authoritative character in compositions purely human ; and he knows that their aim is not different from that which he also would wish to pursue—even to "contend earnestly for the faith once (once for all) delivered to the saints." But with those persons who look upon the doctrines of religion as merely a department of philosophy, in which almost nothing is so determined that it may not require essential revision, he differs so seriously in first principles, that it were vain to expect their acceptance of the main positions here sought to be established. By such persons the Reformation is regarded as a blessing, so far as it was a successful revolt of the human mind against ecclesiastical tyranny, but scarcely at all as the restoration of a Scriptural faith ; and whenever the Protestant Churches would deal with any doctrine as ascertained truth, they are reproached with forgetfulness of the very principles by which they exist. But there is here a radical misconception, surely, of the character and office of the Christian Church. The Church has the Truth, as a deposit, committed to her ; and she, under great responsibilities, is appointed to keep as well as to propagate it. If Protestantism were the denial of this position,

then would Protestantism mean the abolition of the Church of Christ. But it has not this meaning; and our Reformed Church is still addressed in the words of the Apostle—"Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard:" "That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep:" "The things which thou hast heard, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." Nor does the individual teacher in the Church, or the Church as a whole, in recognising this solemn trust, advance any pretensions to Infallibility, or claim exemption from having every utterance tried by the Standard which cannot err. So far is this view of the Church's functions and responsibility from developing priestly arrogance, or leading the pastor to lord it over his flock, that not till the Christian minister is deeply penetrated with it will he attain to true humility. He is "the voice of one crying"—a preacher or "herald,"—and is under awful obligation neither to keep back any part of his message, nor to add anything to it.

The writer may here be allowed to say—what should rather have found place in the body of the essay—that no theory of *subscription* is sanctioned by the Presbyterian Church which would pledge one to regard the language of the Confession of Faith as incapable of improvement; or which would bind him to accept every statement on subordinate matters; or which would require approval of every detail in the statement of matters of higher importance. The well-known *System of Doctrine* set forth in the Confession, as in the other symbols of the Reformed Churches, must, in what by common consent have been deemed its great leading features, be accepted. Whatever individuals may have held or may still hold, the Church does not exact subscription in any sense more stringent than that now explained. To require unqualified approval of every word in the Confession were indeed to treat it as our *Supreme Standard*; which the Presbyterian Church, notwithstanding all that may be said to the contrary, has been very careful not to do. It is hard to see what honest purpose can be served by inventing for the Church a theory of subscription, and then denouncing her severity, as if she proceeded upon this purely fictitious theory.

Nor let it not be supposed that the Presbyterian Church is satisfied with a laxer idea of subscription than formerly prevailed, from her conviction that the doctrine of the Confession needs considerably to be modified, in view of the progress made by Biblical studies during the two hundred and thirty years since the Westminster Standards were compiled. Every Biblical scholar knows that the results achieved by Textual Criticism and Exegesis, interesting and valuable as they are, *do not render necessary any modification of the great doctrines of the Creeds*; these results, indeed, have little appreciable bearing upon the theology of the Church, unless it be to confirm conclusions already reached, but which could hardly be said to require confirmation. We make this statement deliberately, and would wish to be told by those who are ever referring to the progress of accurate Biblical study as having rendered obsolete the Confessions of the Reformation period, what important doctrine of the Standards is thereby discredited? We should probably in reply have some reference to the "six days" of creation; for no well informed man supposes that the qualified approbation with which many Presbyterians accept the teachings of the Confession regarding the Civil Magistrate, would be an instance in point.

The writer of this Discourse, whilst delivering his sentiments freely on matters which he regards as involving truths too important to be compromised, yet hopes that nothing is here said inconsistent with Christian charity. He has tried to deal *fairly* with the views and arguments of those whose conclusions are different from his own. It could yield him no satisfaction to gain an apparent victory over opinions which he had misrepresented, or studiously to conceal objections to his own views which would naturally occur to a mind seeking the truth.

Our consolation is that the knowledge of God, in all that appertains to it, is in higher keeping than man's. The Church may, as an earthly instrumentality, be called "the pillar and ground of the truth;" but, in a sense needing no qualification, "the eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge."

Toronto, 1st Dec., 1875.

A VINDICATION

OF

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS.

DOCUMENTS of the nature of Confessions of Faith are found in the Church from a very early period in its history. It has been supposed by many that when the Apostle Paul exhorts Timothy to "hold fast the *form of sound words* which he had heard of him," there is reference to some brief Statement of the main points of Christian doctrine, drawn up by the Apostle himself, or by him in conjunction with the other Apostles. The "good profession," which Timothy had "professed before many witnesses," has been, sometimes, understood as referring to the same thing. Such a reference, in either case, may be very doubtful; at the same time, there are several passages in the Scriptures which may be pointed to as condensed Summaries of what God has been pleased to reveal to men; and which are, in some sense, the prototypes of the Creeds, Confessions of Faith, Symbols of various kinds, which have been subsequently produced in the Church.

Supposed references in Scripture to Doctrinal Formulas.

The best known, and one of the oldest, if not the very oldest of the Symbols which have come down to us, is the Apostles' Creed, so called. The story of each of the Apostles contributing his part to this composition, and of the whole being stamped with direct apostolical authority, is, no doubt, a fiction; and was not heard of in the Church till near the end of the fourth century. In subjoining to their catechism the Creed, with the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments, the Westminster divines say:—"It is here annexed, not as though it were composed by the Apostles, or ought to be esteemed canonical Scripture, as the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, but because it is a brief sum of the Christian Faith, agreeable to the Word of God, and anciently received in the churches

The Apostles' Creed.

of Christ." This language is well chosen; and, while refusing to regard the Creed as inspired, we need not hesitate to accept its doctrine, so far as it goes, as "agreeable to the Word of God." Luther says of it:—"This Confession of Faith we did not make nor invent, nor did the Fathers before us; but, as a bee collects honey from the beautiful and fragrant flowers of all sorts, so is this Symbol briefly and accurately put together, out of the books of the prophets and apostles, for children and simple-hearted Christians."

Creeds of
Nice and
Chalcedon.

Then we have, from the fourth century, the Nicene Creed; in which the doctrine of the Trinity is carefully defined, in opposition to Arianism, and other errors touching this fundamental truth. In the following century, the Council of Chalcedon issued a Creed, setting forth, with much precision, the Church's doctrine as to the person of Christ; in opposition to those who, on the one hand, deny that our Lord possessed two natures, and those who, on the other hand, ascribe to Him a double personality.

Athanasian
Creed.

The Athanasian Creed is another well-known ancient Symbol, though, like the Apostles' Creed, its designation is spurious, and its composition later than the time of the celebrated Father whose name it bears.

Confessions of
the Reforma-
tion.

The Reformation gave birth to a great deal of symbolic literature. Those who left the Church of Rome found it necessary to set forth clear and unambiguous statements of their belief, that all men might know what they held, and that they might deliver their testimony against the corruptions of the Body from which they had separated. They did not reject the old Creeds, though they condemned Rome; but they required to give a much fuller statement than the ancient Church had done, of all that relates to man's condition by nature, and to the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. The following are among the best known, and most important, of the Symbols of Protestantism:—The Augsburg Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Articles of the Church of England, and the Westminster Confession.

Objections to
Creeds must
be considered.

We wish to point out some of the principal advantages which the Church derives from its Symbolical Books; and to urge the importance of having a due regard to the excellent subordinate Standards which it is our own privilege, as a branch of the Presbyterian Church, to possess. But, inasmuch as objections, some of them apparently formidable, are urged against this whole class

of writings—against promoting any merely human Instruments to the place which Confessions of Faith have held, whether in the early Church, or among the churches of the Reformation—it will be necessary to consider these objections with a little care.

1. It is objected to doctrinal Formularies that they *repress Free Inquiry in religion, and thus hinder the growth of theological science*. Here, it is said, you have the Church bound down to the past, and all unfettered theological inquiry forbidden, and even stigmatised. This is complained of as an intolerable bondage, and, on the part of Protestants, quite inconsistent with their fundamental principle, of the right of private judgment. We are reminded that, in all the other departments of science, knowledge is progressive,—errors are being continually purged, and important additions made to truth. So has it been in Astronomy, in Chemistry, and in Geology. What would have been the consequence had progress in these sciences been barred by an immovable creed? If we are at liberty to differ from our fathers when they hold that the sun revolves around the earth, and that the universe was created in six literal days, why bind us to accept their Theology,—to consider the doctrine of the Trinity, or of Justification by Faith, as firm and settled? It is further said that the churches, by their Confessions, are not only preventing progress in scientific theology, but are repressing and extinguishing noble aspirations after a deeper acquaintance with religion, and are producing a great deal of insincerity in the case of those who cannot afford to break with the Church, whilst thoroughly dissatisfied with her Formularies.

Doctrinal
Formularies
bar progress
in Theological
Science.

In the objection to Creeds, now rehearsed, there is an important, a fundamental misconception as to the nature of theological Science and Inquiry. It is forgotten that *all the facts of the theologian are found in the Bible*. The Church, in drawing up her Creeds, has to use only the materials furnished her in that Word which “cannot be broken,” and from which we may not “take away,” and to which we may not “add.” The Church has not to go out into the wide field of nature and extend her observations from age to age, collecting facts from which deductions may be made; nor does she wait upon the progress of the mental sciences, in order to incorporate in her Confessions the results of an advancing metaphysics, or to adjust her Definitions in accordance with such results. Hence, if she faithfully studies what the Scriptures

Fundamental
misconception
as to the
method of
Theological
Inquiry.

say concerning any doctrine,—the doctrine of the Trinity, of the Divinity of our Lord, of the Divinity and Personality of the Spirit, of the Fall, of the Atonement, of Regeneration, of Faith, of Justification,—if she carefully brings together and analyzes the principal Scripture statements in regard to such matters, and expresses herself in accordance therewith, her Definitions can never need *fundamental* revision. She cannot seriously err, in the great doctrines, unless unfaithful in the examination of Scripture.

Confessions
amenable to
Scripture.

Let it be shown from Scripture, that any doctrine in our Confessions is wrong, and the necessity of revision will have been established. All our Creeds and all our teachings are amenable to Scripture. "If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." It is, therefore, a perfectly reasonable thing that the Church should be asked to show that, in constructing her Confessions, she has rightly understood the Word of God, and neither gone beyond nor fallen short of its statements. The Church may not claim infallibility in the interpretation of Scripture, and meet with her anathema every one who questions her exegesis. Nay, apart from any challenge given, it may be right and proper that our Formularies should, at times, be carefully revised, so as to have them not only in harmony with Scripture, but to secure that their presentation of the truth shall be well suited to the peculiar necessities of the period. It was a wise thing, unquestionably, for the churches of the Reformation to draw up new Symbols; for the ancient ones, while unobjectionable so far as they went, were inadequate in the new condition of the Church: they did not handle sufficiently certain questions of the utmost moment, which were in dispute between the Reformation and the Church of Rome. The Reformed Church of France, it is well known, decided to revise its Standards at regular intervals of four years. This, it seems to us, is much more than is necessary, and not unattended with danger; but the whole Reformation would agree with the French Church in holding that there may, in providence, be a call for revision of the Standards; and that, in subjecting them to renewed examination, there is not necessarily evinced any desire to depart from the "faith once delivered to the saints."

Confessions
may be re-
vised.

The objection
under review
would treat

But what we now concede, and should even, on proper occasion, be disposed to plead for, would by no means satisfy those whose objection to Church Standards we

are now considering. They wish to have *nothing* settled, but everything thrown loose, in deference to the spirit of free inquiry which characterizes the age. They chafe under every restraint on the licence of their speculations. They wish to treat religion simply as a philosophy—as an ordinary department of human speculation; and their views can never harmonize with those of the man who bows to the infallible authority of the Bible. The truth is, that this objection to Creeds has its roots very generally in scepticism, or in the denial of inspiration; and no one who reverently accepts the Scriptures as the oracles of God, can come to an understanding with those who urge it. It were uncharitable, indeed, to affirm that every one on whose lips the objection is found, is a disbeliever; for many take it up thoughtlessly; but we cannot draw back from the opinion expressed, that the objection under consideration is taken in the interest of scepticism, or the gravest error.

religion as
merely a Phil-
osophy.

Most necessary it is that Christian liberty—the liberty with which Christ has made His people free,—should be vindicated. The Presbyterian Church, it is believed, will be the very last to compromise this liberty, and to place any yoke of her own on the neck of Christ's freedmen. She will be sadly forgetful of her own history if she acts otherwise. The right, also, of private judgment must be held sacred, even should men in the exercise of it depart greatly from the truth. Resort must not be had to civil pains and penalties to secure soundness in the faith. Every man, who respects the good order of society, must be at liberty to think and speak as he pleases respecting the highest matters—responsible only to God. All this is very evident, and is not in dispute among us; but all this has no connection with the demand for *freedom*, made by the opponents of Creeds and Confessions. The freedom which they seek, is freedom to remain within the Church, and labour for the subversion of her Faith. We cannot satisfy them except by saying that we have no definite beliefs, and that we hardly wish to have any; and that the liberty to indulge speculation in religion is of more importance than the attainment of that knowledge of the Father and of the Son which the Saviour has declared to be "life eternal."

Christian
liberty and
freedom of
opinion must
be held sacred.

2. It is objected, again, to Confessions of Faith, *that they produce and perpetuate Divisions in the Church of Christ, and promote Sectarianism.* Each party, it is said, will formulate Scripture doctrines in its own way—will

Confessions
alleged to
cause divisions
in the Church.

have its own Creed, which its adherents must subscribe or approve of; and thus comprehension and union among the disciples of Christ are rendered impossible.

Union is to be sought.

Now, we shall not think of denying that the divisions of the Church of Christ are a great and serious evil; and this, even though He who from evil adduces good, has been pleased to overrule them to the production of many benefits. It is especially to be lamented that the children of the Reformation, after delivering their vigorous scriptural protest against Rome, should find themselves separated from one another. Anything which might help towards a union of the churches, on a scriptural basis, should be hailed with much thankfulness by the true disciples of Christ; and not a little guilt rests on those who advocate measures that tend to perpetuate disunion. But we utterly fail to see how the putting away of our Confessions should, in any way, contribute to such a union as is alone to be sought. It is not the Confessions, but the diversities in doctrine and in polity, which find expression in the Confessions, that keep denominations of Christians apart. Sweep away subordinate Standards entirely, and these bodies are as widely asunder as before. If, indeed, the Church of Christ needs no test of faith in order to membership, or in order to entrance upon office, but should receive into her fellowship, irrespective of belief, all who seek connection with her, we can then see how abjuring Standards might facilitate comprehension. But not many of those who urge the objection we are now considering, will argue for fellowship on any such principle: certainly no one who considers that by the Apostles themselves, persons were cast out of the Church for denying essential doctrines of the faith. 1 Tim. i. 19, 20; 2 Tim. ii. 17, 18.

Formularies may be too minute.

We readily grant that it is very possible for churches to make their terms of communion, whether we refer to communion in ordinary membership or ministerial communion, too complex. The Articles of a church may relate to and define too many points; and, where this is the case, the charge of putting obstacles in the way of union really lies. But the error here is not in *having* Standards or Confessions, but in *descending to too great minuteness in these*; and defining, in the name of the Church, points on which the Scriptures do not clearly pronounce, and which should be left to the judgment of individual Christians.

Human standards said to be derogatory to Scripture.

3. The objection to Confessions of Faith which is most frequently met with, and which is, perhaps, the most effective against them, is, *that they are derogatory to Scrip-*

ture. This objection is brought, not by men who are, more or less, of a sceptical spirit, and who wish to cast away the great and precious truths in which is the life of the Church, but most frequently by evangelical Christians—by persons who have no wish to enjoy a latitude in doctrine, which the most approved Symbols of the Reformation would not grant to them.

The Word of God, they say, is the only Standard of the Christian Church—the only Confession of Faith; and to associate with it, in this office, any uninspired production, is to do it great dishonour. To adopt other standards—standards purely human, how excellent soever in doctrine and composition—is to accuse the Scriptures of being insufficient as a rule and guide for the Church.

We, of course, are careful to reply, that the Formularies which obtain sanction among us are regarded only as *Subordinate Standards*, and are so designated; and that nothing can be further from our intention than to claim for these documents an equality, with the Word of God; even as the Westminster Confession itself says:—"The Supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture." But this disclaimer is not held sufficient; and we are told that, whatever our intention may be, the adoption of such writings is really a reflection upon the Scriptures, as implying either that they are chargeable with incompleteness, or with want of clearness and order in statement.

Confessions
only Subordin-
ate Standards.

Let us examine this objection, then, in the two parts of it. (1) The adoption of such standards is held to imply that the Scriptures are *not complete*. Our answer is, that Confessions of Faith are not, in any respect, designed to be supplementary to the Bible. It was never imagined by the churches compiling or accepting such Formularies, that they were at liberty to speak when Scripture was silent, to be explicit where Scripture was reserved, to add a single jot or tittle to that Law which is perfect. "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelation of the Spirit or by tradition of men." Thus the

The Sufficiency
of Scripture
said to be
impugned by
Standards.

The Westminster Confession careful to sustain itself by Scripture.

Westminster Confession. The following language from the Sixth Article of the Church of England is not less decided:—"Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be requisite or necessary to salvation." All the principal Symbols of the Church either contain similar declarations, or were drawn up by men who would have entirely concurred in the language quoted. These Subordinate Standards simply aim at a *formulated expression* of the sense of many passages of Scripture. They are self-convicted if ever they go beyond the inspired Record. The reader of the Westminster Confession knows that the inspired authority for every principal statement or proposition is given at the foot of the page. Certain passages adduced may not be sufficient for the purpose for which they are quoted; that is an entirely different matter; but nothing can be clearer than that the compilers did not, in any thing, feel themselves at liberty to go a hairbreadth beyond the written Word. Whether it were *necessary*, or *could serve any good purpose* to have such books, seeing that the Scriptures are acknowledged to be, in all things, the supreme authority, is a question which we shall immediately endeavour to answer; but it is unfair to represent the mere existence of such Subordinate Standards as insinuating that the Scriptures are not complete—not sufficient in their statement of truth.

Confessions alleged to impugn the arrangement of Scripture.

(2) It is averred, again, in the objection under review, that if the existence of Confessions of Faith does not impugn the sufficiency of Scripture, it implies that the Scriptures are defective in *clearness* and *arrangement*. For, if not, it is argued, whence the need for these Compilations? Why not rest satisfied with the inspired statements in the form and order in which they occur in the Bible? Is it possible for the Scholastic Theologian to improve upon the Apostles and Prophets?

Same objection may be brought

The full answer to this objection will be found in the statement which we are about to make, of the *purposes served* by Creeds and Confessions; but we would, at present, observe, that no person regards it as in disparagement of the *clearness* of Scripture, when spoken or written expositions of its meaning are attempted, or in disparagement of its *method and order*, when, in treatises of systematic theology, an attempt is made to present, in logical sequence and relation, the doctrines of the inspired

volume. Why, then, should doctrinal Formularies be held to reflect upon the one or the other? Certain very important practical ends, it is believed, may be subserved by such Formularies, and, in framing and using them, we are merely *applying Scripture itself*, according to our understanding of it, in a certain way; even as in oral or written discourse, founded on Scripture, we do but apply Scripture. If the Formulary is unscriptural, or, if the Sermon or religious Treatise is unscriptural, that is another matter; but the mere fact of arranging and moulding the statements of Scripture, as is done in the Confessions, cannot, we think, be held as in itself dishonouring to the Word of God.

The Bible does not profess to be a treatise in systematic or logical form. It was given at "sundry times and in divers manners" by men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" and the popular mould in which it is cast has been chosen, in Divine wisdom, to give a value to the "lively oracles" which is far above all completeness in scientific arrangement. Who does not feel the meaning and the value of the Form which God has given to His Word? Who does not perceive that the Scriptures would have come to large classes of men under great disadvantage, had they been given as a systematic treatise? But, whilst recognising, with devout gratitude, the wisdom and goodness of God, in impressing upon His Word the characteristics which it exhibits, the Church does nothing amiss—nothing in forgetfulness of the *form* of Scripture—when, for certain important ends, such as the more ready convincing of gainsayers, or the manifestation of her testimony to the truth, she draws up and sanctions compends of Scripture doctrine, as in our Confessions of Faith and other doctrinal Symbols.

Bible not a
Treatise in
systematic
form.

Never has the Church of Christ been more actuated by reverence for Scripture, never less disposed to substitute anything for it, than at the periods in which our great historical Symbols were drawn up. The members of the Council of Nice, or of the Westminster Assembly, or the framers of the Augsburg Confession, were not men who set little store by Scripture, or would have tolerated any attempt to supersede it, in any of its proper uses, by merely human compositions. Is it not also true that the times in which the Church has kept fast by her Subordinate Standards, are the very times in which the Scriptures have been loved and valued; and that, on the other hand, disesteem of her Confessions, or carelessness about them,

History shows
that regard for
Confessions
does not
diminish re-
verence for
Scripture.

has been found to mark the periods in which the Word of God was little prized? How was it in Scotland and England during the greater part of last century? How has it been on the Continent of Europe? There is more than accident in this coincidence; and we may confidently appeal to history to show that the estimation in which the Church has held her Symbolical Books, is not something to be subtracted from the reverence and affection due to the Word of God.

Uses of Con-
fessions of
Faith.

We now proceed to point out some of the chief uses of Confessions of Faith, and other doctrinal Formularies, with special reference to our own Confession, and the Catechisms associated with it.

Standards a
protection
against error

1. The Subordinate Standards of the Church are *an important aid in protecting it against error*. We say *important aid*; for no one will claim that they are the only protection against heresy, or even the first in rank, which the Church of Christ enjoys. Surely, in regard to this matter, no means is entitled to take precedence of the faithful preaching of the Word. This is the main instrumentality which God has ordained, at once for the diffusion of the truth, and for the counteraction of pernicious error; and should *it* fail, it were useless to expect that the best Confession should either preserve the vitality of the Church, or prove of much service against false doctrine. Again, a place of no little honour should be allowed to the Literature in defence of the truth, which has emanated from the Church in many lands, and in many ages. It is quite impossible to assign to each of these instrumentalities, and to others which might be enumerated, their respective shares in the honour of repelling the assaults of error, and maintaining the Faith in its integrity; but we claim that *some* share in this honour is certainly due to the Confessions and Symbols which the Church has, from time to time, adopted. The statement now advanced should not be controverted by any intelligent student of the Church's history. Moreover, the instinctive aversion with which errorists regard Confessions of Faith, testifies that *they* feel them to be an impediment in their way. It will frequently happen that the first indication of unsoundness in doctrine—the first token of proclivity towards error—is the hostility manifested towards those Symbols which express the beliefs held by the Church of Christ in all ages.

We may easily see how doctrinal Formularies, clear and

concise in their language, should serve the purpose now referred to. In brief and emphatic terms, little capable of being misinterpreted, they enunciate what God has taught His Church regarding the meaning of His Holy Word. Their very presence in the Church—the very knowledge, on the part of the Church's members, that such formal solemn declarations of the Church's Faith exist, has its influence in regulating belief, and restraining heretical tendencies.

But more especially are these Formularies serviceable in preventing *teachers* in the Church from propagating anything contrary to the truth. For the office-bearers of the Church are supposed, at their induction, to have given their solemn assent to its Standards. Unless, therefore, their conscience be somewhat lax, they will not remain in office, and teach what is contrary to their vows at ordination. Cases will be remembered by any one who has knowledge of those branches of the Church in which Confessions have been operative, where teachers who had embraced unsound opinions voluntarily abdicated their position. But, should the errorist not do this—should conscience allow him to disregard altogether, or to give a non-natural meaning to the Symbols he has subscribed, it becomes much easier than in other circumstances, to bring home the charge of error, and procure his expulsion. No dishonour is done to Scripture in making this statement. For while Scripture, in all its great doctrines, is abundantly clear, yet the field of Scripture is very large; and there are statements, in places of it, which the ingenious errorist will have little difficulty in perverting; thus his conviction will be much more difficult, where he has not subjected himself to a test of comparatively easy application. Suppose, e.g., the case of a teacher in the Church charged with denying the divinity of our Lord. If you try his doctrine simply by appeal to Scripture, he will, probably, wander over the whole Bible, and give and defend his interpretation of the passages—many of them capable of being much perverted—which he is sure to adduce in his favour. It will be difficult to bring his case to an issue. The Church Authorities may, indeed, decide that his interpretations of Scripture are illegitimate; or may even enunciate, before he enters on his defence, what the Scriptures *really teach* respecting this momentous doctrine. But this is simply to have an *unwritten* Confession of Faith—an exposition of Scripture understood

Standards are a barrier against unsound teaching, and they facilitate the conviction of the errorist.

to be sanctioned as the true one—and is, surely, less satisfactory than to have some short and clear Symbol which shall have been deliberately assented to by all. The very excellencies of the Scriptures, their very perfection for the great ends for which they were given, render them, we may with reverence say, less suitable for *immediate* application to the purpose we are speaking of.

No injustice in using the Confession as a test of teaching.

No teacher in a Church possessing a Confession, has any ground for complaining of injustice done him, if his doctrine is brought to the test of a Formulary which he has himself subscribed; and it implies want of candour or of intelligence to raise an outcry when parties are thus dealt with, as if their rights and liberties were overridden by ecclesiastical tyranny.

Service rendered by Standards not exaggerated.

We have not space to enlarge more upon this use of the Confession. We have been careful not to exaggerate its value in respect to the end spoken of. We have not assigned to Creeds the highest place among the means by which God, in His providence, preserves His truth from corruption; and certainly no word has been used which puts Confessions, or anything else which falls under the category of *means*, in the place of the enlightening, life-giving, and purifying presence of the Spirit of God: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

Confession of Faith a guide to those seeking the Fellowship of the Church.

2. Confessions of Faith are *declarations of the Church's principles*, fitted to be useful to several classes of persons, but especially to those who are seeking the Fellowship of the Church. The duty of the Church, in making known her Principles, as well as her Aims, is chiefly discharged, no doubt, by the public preaching of the Word. Even as in regard to the previous point, this agency must be placed first. It cannot be said by any to whom our public religious assemblies are open, that they have no opportunity of learning what we believe concerning the things of God. And, in the declaration of our principles and exhibition of our testimony, preaching is aided, in these latter days, by a varied and abundant religious literature. But yet there is room—may we not say *necessity*?—for something more. Many will wish to see some Authoritative Statement, in moderate compass, as to what the Church really holds. We cannot doubt that, when Creeds began to be sanctioned, the Church, amongst other ends to be served by them, contemplated the one of which we now speak. And these ancient Creeds, so far as they went, were adapted to fulfil the purpose mentioned.

Who, after reading the Nicene Creed, could have any doubt as to what the Church held concerning the Trinity? Or who could examine the Creed of Chalcedon, and not know what the Church believed concerning the Person of her Lord? Here were the utterances not of an individual member of the Church, however eminent, but the well-considered, formal, solemn testimony of the Church in its collective capacity. What farther was needed to attest, in the most authentic manner, the doctrines and principles on which it rested?

The Church might, indeed, have said to all who impugned her doctrines, or made inquiry regarding them, "Here is a book which we hold to be inspired of God. We believe all that is therein contained. Read it and you will have sufficient knowledge of our doctrines. This is our rule of faith: this is our rule of life." But suppose the assailant or the inquirer to have replied: "We wish to know how you *interpret* the book, and what you regard as its scope and drift touching the high questions with which it deals." When thus addressed, would it not be of obvious advantage to be prepared to furnish such a statement of the Church's faith as the Symbols we have referred to contain?

The churches are not now, it is true, surrounded, as in ancient times, with a population in great part ignorant of the very primary truths of religion; and it might seem as if, with respect to the matter referred to, Confessions could *now*, at least, be dispensed with. No person in Christendom, who has any intelligence at all, is ignorant that the Church of Christ holds the doctrines set forth in the Apostles' Creed. Let us, however, call to mind the circumstances in which the Church finds herself in these later times. The visible Church is now sadly dismembered; for not only has the East been separated from the West, but Protestantism, in great strength, has seceded from the corrupt Church of Rome; and the children of the Reformation, alas! have not been able to dwell together, but are separated and distinguished by diversities in doctrine, which we cannot always call unimportant. It seems, then, as if in view of this the present state of Christendom, the necessity of churches having their Confessions, were very apparent. Earnest-minded men, who seek intelligently to determine their church connexion, will often desire to know what this or that religious denomination holds, and wherein it differs from other denominations occupying, perhaps, the same territory. Now, the

Differences
between re-
ligious denom-
inations make
necessary
some declara-
tion of their
principles.

churches should be prepared to meet this case, and to put it in the power of every one to examine their position and claims. Men have a right to say to *us*, e. g., "You call yourselves the Presbyterian Church; you claim, we doubt not, to be, in doctrine, discipline, and worship, according to the New Testament model. We wish to see some authoritative account of what you *do* hold respecting the Faith, Constitution, and Functions of the Church of Christ."

Presbyterians
glad to point
to their
Standards.

We, as Presbyterians, are always glad to be thus addressed, and have satisfaction in referring all who inquire concerning us, to the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Is it not well, we ask, even for this purpose, that we have our Subordinate Standards? Would it improve our position should the views of some prevail, and these and similar Documents be cancelled altogether?

Confessions a
bond of union
and fellowship
among church-
members.

3. Confessions of Faith, by helping to supply the members of the Church with grounds of confidence in their mutual orthodoxy, *become bonds of union and fellowship among them*. In seeking connection with any branch of the Church of Christ, one will desire to know what is believed by those with whom he is to stand in so close and sacred relations. Should he discover that they differ widely from him in their understanding of the most important doctrines, he can hardly expect, by joining their fellowship, to have his edification and comfort promoted, or even, with advantage, to render his personal testimony to the truth. He will be held, we cannot say unjustly, in measure responsible for the soundness in the faith of his fellow church-members. The principles of the Society he unites with, and is incorporated into, will be held to be endorsed by him, and its responsibilities assumed by him, in conjunction with his fellow-members. This is the common judgment of mankind, and it is of no little importance that it should be respected. Many branches of the Church have greatly suffered, and many excellent Christian men have had their testimony to the truths of the Gospel much compromised, by their union in church-membership with those who held little in common with them regarding the most important doctrines of Scripture.

Comfort in
fellowship
requires
mutual confidence as to
soundness in
the Faith.

But even were one not held, in any measure, responsible for the belief of his Church, must not the comfort of fellowship be greatly impaired where there exists a want of confidence in the doctrinal soundness of those called Christian brethren, or where it is not possible to attain to satisfaction on this point? Many persons, we

dare say, will reply to us, that Doctrine has little to do with Fellowship, and that all that is required to mutual confidence and edification is the possession of Christian character and pious feeling on the part of those who are brought together. But is it well, we may ask, thus to separate between Christian character and soundness in the Faith? Is the former likely to escape decay, where the latter is seriously impaired?

Do we, then, expect every member of the Church to subscribe its Formularies, in order to give assurance to his brethren respecting his belief? Is it not too much to demand of all applicants for church membership, that they shall accept every statement in such a Document, e. g., as the Westminster Confession of Faith? We readily admit, that there are persons to whom we should not be justified in refusing church-membership, although they could not set their hand to the whole doctrine of our excellent Confession. They may not have been able to examine it with sufficient care to give an altogether intelligent assent to it; or there may be matters embraced in the Confession, respecting which some degree of doubt remains with them; yet they are so evidently the Lord's children, and so cordial in their appreciation of evangelical truth, that we should greatly exceed our authority in declining to admit them into our Communion. What is now said is no novelty among us, but is generally admitted and acted upon in the Presbyterian churches; and a distinction is made between the terms on which *office-bearers* of the Church are inducted, and those on which *ordinary members* are received. Nor is there any hardship in requiring of those to be set apart to teach and rule, a fuller declaration of their belief than is necessary in the case of unofficial members—of those asking nothing more than to be recognised as the disciples of Christ.

Subscription of Standards not required on the part of private members of the Church.

But, in allowing this distinction, the Church does not abate her testimony nor impair the value of her Standards as a bond of Union among her members. Persons may be received into communion who have not yet seen their way to the acceptance of everything contained in these Standards; but if the Church is faithful in their admission to fellowship, they hold nothing in contravention of the main principles therein exhibited; and should private members of the Church teach and propagate views inconsistent with the Church's testimony, it is right and necessary that they should be held to account, though they should not have subscribed the Formularies. But

Private members should not propagate views in opposition to the main principles of the Standards.

the truth is, that if the Church's *teaching* remains sound—if the Pulpit is not uncertain in its utterances—there is, in ordinary circumstances, little danger of serious error making much progress among the people. It is surely a matter of great consequence, that those joining a communion should have the best guarantees for the character of the *teaching* everywhere heard within it.

Confessions of value though they cannot of themselves preserve the Truth.

The possibility, of course, always exists of a church so falling from the doctrine of her Standards, that these shall become practically obsolete, though they have not been formally set aside. And if so, what is the value of Confessions or Articles, as a bond of Union? How do they serve to regulate church-fellowship? We reply, that we have been careful not to put Formularies of doctrine in a place which cannot belong to them, nor to attribute to them a power which they cannot exercise. They are not a substitute for the Spirit's presence in the Church, nor for the faithful preaching of the Gospel, nor for faithfulness in the administration of discipline, nor for honesty on the part of ministers and people. But where a church is, on the whole, vital,—where she is disposed in love and fidelity to make her Standards operative, they will prove of real service in securing the unity and harmony of the Church, and inspiring her members with mutual confidence.

Were we to compare churches which have Confessions and *respect* them, with churches which either have no Confessions or have allowed their Confessions to become a dead letter, we should be struck with the great difference between them as to their consciousness of *unity*—of a common life and common responsibility for the condition and action of the Church. In some churches, all that many a pious man seeks is that he shall be allowed to *hold* the truth; if a minister, to *preach* it, and to regulate his personal conduct in accordance therewith. He hardly thinks of any kind of united action on the part of his Church, in the interest of the truth, as of possible realization. He never dreams of responsibility attaching to *himself*, for the attitude in which his Church is found, and the influence she puts forth. If his Church's ministers are evangelical and faithful, he is glad; if the contrary, he mourns in private, but hardly feels as if called to do anything more. Now, where this state of things exists, there is serious defect and weakness; the Church is an object of compassion to her friends, and of scorn and derision to her enemies. How different it would

The Standards of a church assist in developing the feeling of Unity in the body.

be with her did a complete organization, and a pervasive sense and feeling of unity, allow her to put forth her strength, in one direction, for good.

There are, again, other Churches—may we not, without offence, name our own, the Presbyterian?—in which the Body is far more intimately *one*. Every member of the Church is taught to cherish the feeling that he is a part of it, and to realize the responsibility therein involved. Along with all his brethren in communion, he is accountable for the doctrine heard throughout his Church, for the administration of discipline, for the action of church-courts, for the general procedure of the Body. He, personally, has responsibility. He must discharge his duty in this regard, and keep his conscience clear. He must strive to make his influence, be it great or small, tell upon his Church, to the increase of her strength for good and towards the removal of evil. The general condition of the Church can no more be matter of indifference to him, than the general condition of the body to the eye and the ear, the hand and the foot. If this feeling of responsibility is regulated by intelligence, and accompanied by love of the brethren, it is an element of great strength and value to the Church. How much the Presbyterian Church has been indebted to her sense of a common life! How nobly, at many periods of her history, has she moved as a unit under its influence! And how nobly, too, in times of declension, have faithful Minorities within her pale striven to rectify her doctrine or her policy, and to bring her back to fidelity and truth! It would be too much to ascribe all this to her having a common Creed; but we are very confident that the place which she has given to her Standards, is one of the conditions under which this feeling of a common responsibility, and power of a common life, have been developed. You will not, unless we are greatly mistaken, find these in equal degree in churches which have no Confession, or in which, from whatever cause, Confessions have become a nullity. While the history of Congregationalism is, in many respects, extremely honourable, it cannot compare with that of Presbyterianism, in the matter of developing a healthy consciousness of a common life in the Church.

4. The Subordinate Standards of a Church *may be valuable guides in the work of religious instruction*. No end served by such Compositions can be of greater importance than this. We shall, therefore, dwell upon it with rather greater fulness than has been observed upon any of the previous topics.

The Presbyterian Church much indebted to her sense of common responsibility.

Standards a directory in religious instruction.

Ancient Creeds
brief, yet of
some value in
directing in-
struction.

The ancient Creeds, the Apostles', Nicene, Chalcedon, Athanasian, were comparatively short, and relate chiefly to *God*. They set forth the Church's belief concerning the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of the Son and of the Spirit, and the relations of the Persons in the Godhead to each other. The Apostles' Creed, though the briefest, is, perhaps, the most comprehensive of them all. These venerable Symbols do not exhibit, with any detail, the teachings of the Scriptures concerning *man*,—his original holy condition, his state as fallen and under the curse, his state as regenerate. Nor do they furnish any adequate statement of the work of the Son, and the work of the Holy Ghost in redemption. They are narrow in their range, as compared with any one of the Confessions or Formulas originated by the Reformation. It hence arises—not to speak of their brevity—that they had not the value, for purposes of instruction, which belongs to our modern Symbolical writings. Yet, brief as they are, and partial in topic, these ancient Creeds indicate many points which must have prominence in any course of religious instruction. But when we refer to the principal Confessions of the Protestant churches, whether the great Lutheran Symbol, or the Confessions of the Calvinistic side of the Reformation, how admirable are they in their comprehensiveness, as in their arrangements of topics; and how well fitted to become Directories in instruction. Let us speak more especially, in this connection, of our own Standards, and thus give to our remarks a more practical turn. In the Westminster Confession of Faith we have a most excellent *System of Theology*. Hardly any topic is wanting which would enter into a course of instruction, whether for the old or the young, whether for the ordinary learner or the scientific student. Compare with it the most elaborate of our great works on Systematic Theology, and you will find the substance of them all in this admirable Compend. Look over the "contents" of our Confession, beginning with the chapter—"Of the Holy Scriptures," and ending with the chapter—"Of the Last Judgment," and tell us what is absent, on which a parent would wish to instruct his children, a minister his people, or even a theological professor his students. And as the work is comprehensive, so its arrangement is good, and its definitions and statements remarkable for clearness and point. All this might, indeed, be expected, when we remember that for four years and a half so many of the most eminent divines of Great Britain, in a period singularly favoured with

Westminster
Confession,
an excellent
system of
Theology.

pious and eminent divines, were assiduously engaged in the preparation of our Standards. It results from our Confessions' possessing in so high degree the qualities mentioned, that it must be of great use as a guide to those who conduct courses of religious instruction. All the main topics are here given; the territory to be occupied, carefully mapped out; and there should be little difficulty on the part of the intelligent instructor who follows the Confession, in expanding and illustrating, as far as may be requisite to make his teaching practically effective. We are not here speaking of a thing which has never been attempted; and suggesting a use of the Confession not contemplated by its compilers, nor thought of by the generations of our fathers, who have had this book in their possession. Many a course of instruction, given from the pulpit, has kept the Confession steadily in view;—not to its detriment in point of originality and force, and greatly to its advantage in respect to fulness and method;—securing also a proper relative prominence in the treatment of the several truths and principles of Revelation. We by no means say that the exposition of the Confession of Faith should be, for us Presbyterians, the true idea of preaching; but we cannot refrain from stating our opinion, that when such an aid in the ordering of instruction is quite disregarded, preaching, in many instances, will suffer loss. The *tone* of the book, we may also say, is admirable; and the statements of divine truth which the Confession lays before us are calm, reverent and withal thoroughly evangelical.

Confession of service in arranging a course of instruction for pulpit.

But it is not for the pulpit alone that the Confession has value as a Guide or Directory, in ordering courses of instruction. It might obviously be referred to with much advantage in teaching classes of young persons; and at a time when so much attention is wisely bestowed by ministers and others upon this department of work, it is well that the Confession should be drawn upon, as far as it may furnish assistance.

Guide in teaching Bible classes.

When, however, the question of the Standards, in their relation to instruction, is before us, the *Catechisms* at once come into prominence. For the very purpose of serving as "Directories" in the instructing of "those who are of weaker capacity," and of "such as have made some proficiency in the knowledge of the grounds of religion," were the Catechisms agreed upon.

The Catechisms especially valuable for purposes of instruction.

The *doctrine* of the Catechism, it is superfluous to say, is the same as that of the Confession; and while several

Doctrine of Confession and

Catechisms the same. topics treated of in the Confession are omitted in the Catechisms, the arrangement is substantially the same.

The Shorter Catechism of great use.

With respect to the Shorter Catechism, it is spoken of by all who are not opposed to the doctrine of our subordinate Standards, with nearly unqualified praise. This praise is unquestionably merited; but it behoves us to see that words of compliment become not a substitute for *diligence in the use* of the Catechism. Few of the members of our Church, who are heads of families, would think it right, we hope, to disuse the Catechism in the instruction of their households. It would be hard, indeed, to find any Manual for catechising which could advantageously replace it. We mention the following features of the Shorter Catechism as admirably qualifying it to serve the purpose for which it was compiled:—I. *Its comprehensiveness*. The Shorter Catechism comprises everything regarding the facts and principles of the Christian Faith, which we need to teach the younger members of our families. We have stated that some matters found in the Confession are left out of the Catechisms; and it will be admitted that while these matters are properly enough embraced in the Confession, they are, with equal propriety, omitted in the Catechisms. The Confession of Faith has chapters on “Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience,” on “Marriage and Divorce,” on the “Civil Magistrate,” on “Synods and Councils;” now it is evidently not necessary that the Catechisms should contain anything equivalent to these chapters. But the most rapid analysis of the Shorter Catechism will show what a variety of topics is found in it, and how completely the ground necessary to be occupied, is surveyed and taken possession of. After the two introductory questions, touching the “Chief End of man,” and the “Rule given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him,” the Catechism proceeds:—“What do the Scriptures principally teach?” The answer indicates the method of the book: “The Scriptures principally teach *what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.*” This is the simple two-fold division of its contents. Under the *first* general head we have such topics as these:—The Trinity; the decrees of God; creation and providence; man’s original condition; man’s condition as fallen; God’s purpose of mercy; the Redeemer—divine and human—prophet, priest and king; the work of the Spirit in the application of redemption; the benefits of redemption, whether in this life—justification, adoption, sanctification,—or in the life to come—per-

The Shorter Catechism characterized by comprehensiveness.

Analysis of contents of Shorter Catechism.

fect blessedness in the full enjoyment of God to all eternity. Under the *second* head we have a careful analysis and exposition of the Ten Commandments, as a summary of the Moral Law. Then the duties of Faith and Repentance are explained. Finally, the ordinary Means of Grace are treated of,—the hearing of the Word, the Sacraments and Prayer.

No one is likely to complain of the omission of topics on which our youth should be catechised. On the contrary, some are offended (we speak of those who agree with the Doctrine of the Catechism) with the introduction of certain points, which they think should be presented only to a maturer class of persons than those for whose benefit the Shorter Catechism was specially intended. Thus, objection has been taken to the Catechism for containing anything respecting the *decrees of God*. Some have used even strong terms in condemnation of the impropriety of bringing so high a subject before the minds of children. But we might ask whether there is any statement in the Catechism regarding the decrees of God which cannot safely fall into the hands of those who are supposed to read the Scriptures? What does the Catechism say?

“The decrees of God are. His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for His own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass;” and again, “God having, out of His mere good pleasure, from all eternity elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of an estate of sin and misery, and bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.” Now, we may well ask, whether, if it be improper to bring such words before children, it be not required, that in reading the Scriptures, children should keep their Bibles closed at such passages as the following: “According as He hath chosen us in Him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before Him, in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will?”

The Catechism enters into no speculations of human philosophy regarding this high theme: it aims merely at stating, in the plainest words, the teaching of the Bible; and if it has erred in introducing this matter, its mode of presenting the whole subject of the Covenant of Grace—of the work of redemption—would need to be greatly modified. The truth is, that there is little difference be-

Blamed by some for introducing topics which are too high for the young.

Scriptures might be forbidden the young on the same ground.

Catechism eschews speculation.

tween the Child and the Man, in regard to ability to comprehend what the Catechism says, or what the Bible says, about the Decrees of God and Predestination. Besides, the faith of the Church should never transcend, on this or any other matter, the plain teachings of Scripture ; and if, in our statements regarding the divine fore-ordination, Scripture be closely adhered to, we can see no good reason why the Catechism should observe an entire silence on a subject to which the Scriptures so often and so plainly make reference.

But in making these remarks, we find ourselves defending the Catechism against the charge of being *too* comprehensive—not the reverse. We may suppose it, therefore, on all hands, admitted, that the Catechism embraces everything which should be found in such a Manual.

The Shorter Catechism characterized by Depth ; yet not too deep for the young, if carefully explained to them.

2. The Shorter Catechism is *characterized by Depth*. We are quite aware that many regard this feature of it as a serious disadvantage, rather than a point of merit. Reference has already been made to the charge brought against it of introducing topics which had better be omitted: very generally, the same parties who blame it on this ground, would censure it as being also too profound for the young ; as well as too hard and technical in its language. In offering a word of vindication, we assume that the Shorter Catechism is not of necessity the very first catechism used in the instruction of children. There are several excellent little catechisms of a more primary kind, which may well go before it. But, granting this, it is still urged that the Shorter Catechism is deep and technical enough for the professed theologian, and altogether too difficult for the young,—certainly not suited to those who are of “weaker capacity.” This objection to the Catechism is a very plausible one, and is thought to have force by many who are not ill-disposed towards our Standards. We are convinced, however, that the Catechism has erred on the safer side. It is far better that our children should have upon their memory definitions and statements a little in advance of them when first learned, than that in after years they should find that their Catechism, laboriously committed, is too primary—too juvenile, to be of much value as a permanent possession. These precious seeds deposited in the soil, while yet the season appears too early for growth, will in due time spring up, and yield abundant increase. It is a mistake to suppose that all the instruction communicated to children, all the definitions they commit to memory, all the views and principles

Definitions committed to memory may properly be

given them, should be exactly on a level with their mental development, and should contain no element which may unfold and fructify as they grow towards maturity. No intelligent Presbyterian is ashamed to recall the words of his Catechism when he reaches manhood. If pious, as well as intelligent, he will tell you that these words grew upon him in truth and depth, the more he reflects upon them. Yea, many an aged believer among us revolves in his mind, with a delight second only to that with which the words of Inspiration are remembered, Definitions and Answers treasured up in early youth.

somewhat in
advance of the
present intel-
ligence.

We are persuaded that the Depth and Thoroughness of the Catechism are among its excellencies; and as to any terms or expressions which are technical or compact, these can, in almost every case, be rendered intelligible, even to pretty young persons, by the competent instructor. It is hard, indeed, to see how the truths of the Bible can be taught at all, without employing terms which some would stigmatize as technical; and, certainly, on this ground, the Scriptures, themselves, have often been found fault with.

3. The Catechism presents a *good and orderly arrangement of its topics*. The proof of this has been already exhibited, and need not be repeated in the present connexion. There are, as might be expected, different views as to the best order of presenting systematically, the doctrines of the Christian Religion. The discussion of this difficult question would, however, be altogether out of place in an Essay of the present character. Suffice it to say, that, while some very eminent men have preferred another starting-point, and manner of development, the order adopted by the Catechisms and the Confession of Faith is the one most generally followed by writers on Systematic Theology. To those who have studied some of the more lengthened works on this science, it seems very admirable that, in a book of a few pages, it should have been possible to condense so much matter, whilst giving to it a form and symmetry not surpassed by the largest and most approved treatises.

Good arrange-
ment of topics
in S. C.

Now it is hardly necessary to dwell upon the importance of good arrangement in a manual of this kind. All that might be said in favour of an orderly manner of handling any complex and important subject, would be relevant here. A proper ordering of topics carries the mind along naturally and pleasurably, is a great aid to the memory, and secures that one point shall throw light

Importance of
arrangement.

upon another. Those who may at any time have given instruction according to catechisms inferior to the Shorter in arrangement, will understand and appreciate the excellence here claimed for it. But in pleading for the use of the Shorter Catechism by parents and other instructors of the young among ourselves, it is superfluous to compare it with any other catechism: for the choice will lie, practically, between it and *none*. But when the merits of the Catechism are under discussion at all, it deserves to be said, that no catechism of any church, as far as we know, excels it in exact and beautiful order.

Larger Catechism also possessed of great merit.

Having spoken thus at length of the Shorter Catechism, we shall not enlarge upon the merits or the uses of the *Larger*. Its high and varied excellencies are admitted by all who have made it a careful study; and whenever any Presbyterian is heard speaking lightly of the Larger Catechism, you are probably correct in judging that he has but an imperfect acquaintance with it.

This Catechism will be found very useful for several purposes, and especially as a Guide in conducting advanced classes of young persons. In many Bible-classes the Scriptures and the Larger Catechism are the textbooks, and are found amply sufficient. It is extraordinary how much matter is packed into some of its Answers. Then all is pervaded by a remarkable wisdom, making it extremely valuable not only in teaching the young, but also to Christian persons of all ages, in cases where direction is sought for the life or the conscience. A single reference will suffice for illustration here. Could anything be wiser, more faithful and more tender, than the answers to these two questions: "What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, in the time of the administration of it?" and "What is the duty of Christians after they have received the Lord's Supper?" We do not give the answers, which are considerably long, but only beg of those who allow themselves to speak of the Larger Catechism as obsolete and useless, to ponder these and many other Answers in this book, and then say whether their judgment upon the Catechism does not need to be revised.

We know how, in past ages, the Catechisms were esteemed and used by ministers and parents in the Presbyterian Church; nor were the Nonconformists of England and New England behind Presbyterians, for a long time, in their appreciation of the Catechisms, and their assiduity in the use of them. Our Congregational brethren

have now very generally, we suppose, allowed the Westminster Catechisms, as also their own Modifications of the Westminster Confession, to fall into disuse among them. With respect to *ourselves*, we have not perhaps sufficient data to compare, quite justly, the present with the past. There may occasionally be fears that the comparison would not be favourable to our own time. But in any case, let parents, and all others charged with the solemn and responsible duty of giving religious instruction to the young, "suffer the word of exhortation;" let them prosecute their high work with still more prayerful diligence; and let them not dream of throwing aside, or neglect to employ, a help so valuable as the Shorter Catechism. We greatly fear that where Presbyterians have discontinued the use of the Shorter Catechism, it is to be attributed, in most instances, to a spirit of carelessness about the work in which the Catechism was meant to give assistance. Let us tremble at the thought of being found unfaithful in a matter so important as the religious training of our children—a matter on which the prosperity, nay, the very existence, of the Church of Christ depends.

Are we teaching the Catechism as carefully as our fathers did?

And now, in bringing this Essay to a close, we wish to add a word respecting the obligation which rests upon our own and the other Branches of the Church of Christ, to regard with due appreciation those Statements and Definitions of the great Scriptural truths which have come down to us, some of them from an early period in the Church's history. We shall, certainly, err if we throw these Definitions, in a body, contemptuously aside. They are, no doubt, human; we never claim for them an equality with the Holy Scriptures. But they are, generally, the fruit of much study, consultation and prayer in the Church. And while we keep away from the impious Romish doctrine of the Church's Infallibility, we shall not deny, surely, that the Spirit of God, in accordance with the Saviour's promise, has been the Teacher of His people; and that, moreover, in the Providence of God certain great truths of Scripture have been brought—now one, now another—with peculiar clearness before the mind of His Church, so that she has been able to express and formulate these for coming ages. Is it not well then that we should conserve the inheritance which has come down to us? Is it wise, is it modest, is it quite consistent with due recognition of the Spirit's presence in the Church, unceremoniously to reject all that she offers us of

Obligation resting on us to have due regard to the Standards.

Nothing Romish in valuing the careful definitions of the truth made by the Church in the past.

the fruit of her toil, in working out the meaning and harmony of the great Christian doctrines, as declared in the holy Word ?

Temperate
suggestions of
revision should
not be held
sacrilegious.

Our age is restless, no doubt, and given to change, and one token of this spirit is the eagerness which many show to have the Church set free from the restraint of Confessions and of Doctrinal Formularies altogether. It is of little use, we know, to meet the tendencies of the period in which our lot is cast, with language of general censure and denunciation. We must try to understand our age, to sympathize with it under its difficulties, and to lead it gently onwards, if possible, to greater security and peace. It would be a mistake, therefore, to treat any temperate suggestions for improving our Formularies in minor matters, or for giving them special adaptation to the exigencies of our own age, as betraying an unwillingness to submit to the truth of God, or a desire to alter essentially the Faith of the Church. It is not necessarily a sacrilegious thing to speak of *revising* our subordinate Standards ; and we must never speak or act in regard to them as if the epithet *subordinate* were not correctly used to designate them. But if men wish to have them cast aside, that each one may be free to believe and to teach whatever he pleases, or to have them fundamentally revised in the interests of Modern Unbelief, it is obvious that such demands and such a spirit must be resisted at all hazards. The practical difficulties in the way of frequent periodic revision, even in a right spirit, are very great, if not insuperable ; and we could by no means regard it as a wise thing to follow the example of the Reformed French Church, in its early history, in reviewing our Confession every four years. Providence will, no doubt, open the way for Revision when it becomes really a matter of importance to the Church that it should take place.

The Standards
will be in no
danger of un-
worthy treat-
ment if we
hold fast the
truths which
they exhibit.

Truly, the Presbyterian Church has received many Legacies of great value, and amongst these we are entitled to number her Subordinate Standards. It were easy to show that her Standards have rendered important service to her in many periods and crises of her history. We, as Presbyterians, shall show ourselves little thankful if we forget all this. But the great security against all attempts to displace the Standards—the principal means of allaying the desire for a doctrinal freedom which the Standards will not allow—is to cherish an earnest love of those great Scriptural truths, the full and uncompromising exhibition of which is their most prominent characteristic

Let us "buy the truth and sell it not." Let us "hold fast the faithful word even as we have been taught." "Let the word of God dwell in us richly in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;" and then shall we know how to reserve for the Book "given by inspiration of God," a place which no merely human composition may share with it; whilst retaining, in due respect and honour, Symbols so truly Scriptural in doctrine and tone as the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. It would be a serious evil if the Presbyterian Church should fail in catholicity of spirit and practice; for it really seems as if, in the present time, it were in no small measure entrusted to her to represent, in her Doctrinal Basis and in her practice and sympathies, the Unity of the Church of Christ; but it would be an evil of still more appalling magnitude should we ever waver in our attachment to the Doctrines of Grace, and in our love of those great Evangelical Principles which our Church has been so much honoured to uphold and propagate. May we and all the Churches of the Saints "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

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